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BOOK REVIEWS

- MODERN DRAMA IN EUROPE. By Storm Jameson. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1920. Pp. 280.
- ESSAYS ON MODERN DRAMATISTS. By William Lyon Phelps. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1921. Pp. 278.
- ON BUILDING A THEATRE. By Irving Pichel. New York: The Theatre Arts, Inc. 1920. Pp. 78.
- CHIEF CONTEMPORARY DRAMATISTS. SECOND SERIES. Selected and Edited by Thomas H. Dickinson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1921. Pp. 734.
- THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS. Edited and Selected by George Cram Cook and Frank Shay. Cincinnati: Stewart Kidd Company. 1921. Pp. 272.
- THE EMPEROR JONES; DIFF'RENT; THE STRAW. By Eugene G. O'Neill. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1921. Pp. 285.
- SIX WHO PASS WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL. By Stuart Walker. Cincinnati: Stewart & Kidd Company. 1921. Pp. 54.
- THE CULT OF CONTENT. By Noel Leslie. Boston: The Four Seas Company. 1921. Pp. 31.

Contemporary drama, as regards both direction and evaluation, is slowly finding itself, but the currents and cross-currents are not few and not readily chartable. A growing subjectivity is not inconsistent with an intense interest in social and moral questions (an interest, indeed, variously conditioned) and is consistent both with an idealistic realism (Ibsen, Tchekhov, Masefield) and with a symbolistic romanticism (Hauptmann, Maeterlinck).

There are, however, tributaries and perversions of the three main tendencies—the realistic drama of the north of Europe, the traditional drama of the south, and the drama of the revolt against realism—and Mrs. Jameson, in her brilliant and confident fashion, explores both the prime tendencies and the checking or accompanying movements. She finds the giants in Strindberg and Ibsen, both great realists, both northern and Scandinavian, both aware—the former consciously, the latter implicitly—of Nietzsche. Strindberg, however, although he has courage, lacks joy. His work strikes through pessimistically to

the inalienable element of conflict in life, class with class, sex with sex, its eternal war-process, but rises above the earlier realism by its will-to-power, despite the hopelessness of life. Ibsen is Strindberg's superior in both technique and soul-discovery. His work has extraordinary rhythm of character and action. As Mrs. Jameson finely puts it:—

“Each of his great dramas is an organic whole, of which the action is the body, and the spiritual movement the soul.” (p. 108).

While Mrs. Jameson's exaltation of Ibsen is largely just, it is apparent that he and Strindberg are not merely the preferences of her critical faculty, but also the heroes of her personal liking, of her personal predilection for a vital realism, for an intelligible adaptation of the riper thought of Nietzsche, and of her strong personal dislike of feminism, which she loses no opportunity to berate, by no means ineffectively.

We have no quarrel with this capable writer's broad method of cataloguing and comparing the more important figures in the drama of our time, but we find a too insistent twist given to the pervading central comparison with Ibsen, whose technical influence on drama is greater than the spiritual and intellectual, precisely because his technique was to him a more certainly first-hand, less mediated, programme and achievement than were his ideas. Mrs. Jameson as often exaggerates her praise as she condemns through or by under-statement. Few critics would agree with her choice of *Rosmersholm* as the finest of Ibsen's dramas, the height of his power (pp. 75, 76). She herself is uneasy about this choice—quite contradictorily uneasy—on pages 97, 98 and 99.

Her praise of Barrie and of Oscar Wilde is sound enough, but based on the flexible standards of which she complains. She effectively ‘places’ Brieux and Barker, and she treats Hauptmann justly. But she fails to make out her cases against Björnson, Pinero, Maeterlinck, Yeats and Masefield. Her treatment of Synge is of only indifferent value, but her remarks on the Russian and Southern drama are sympathetic. Lord Dunsany she dismisses with the remark that he has an “American reputation”.

Her analysis of Shaw is excellent, but she mars it by writing on page 140 of his half-success as a thinker, while emphasizing on page 183 his "intellectual greatness". The attribution to Wordsworth (pp. 187-189) of large influence on peasant-realism in drama is quite unsound, and the examination of symbolism (pp. 50, 51, 198-9) is rather perverse.

The style of the work is stimulating and its diction, for the most part, accurate and delicate, but there occur at times serious lapses in clarity and even in syntax. In general, although decidedly uneven in discernment, hence in value, the discussion provides a valuable addition to the critical literature of the subject. The author has three outstanding merits: she has read widely and carefully, and, despite her too positive tone and the not infrequent betrayal of a non-judicial bias of temper (she forgets Guy de Maupassant's remark that a true critic's comprehension "should so completely absorb his personality that he could appreciate and even praise the very books which, as a man, he does not like, but which he should understand as a judge"), she thinks for herself and writes sincerely. The final "Summary" is exceptionally well done.

Professor Phelps discusses, in genial, companionable fashion, six modern dramatists—Barrie, Shaw, Galsworthy, Fitch, Maeterlinck, and Rostand—for no other reason than because they interest him. "Four of them are alive, and the other two ought to be." We conjecture that he would hardly have dealt so conspicuously with Clyde Fitch save for local and personal reasons. As Professor Phelps says, "no play of universal importance has ever been written in the Western Hemisphere". Yet this essay, like the others, is informative. Perhaps the best of the group, in point of critical insight, is that on Galsworthy, while the most humanly engaging is the warm appreciation of Barrie, to the secret of whose unfailing attraction Professor Phelps comes rather nearer than does Mrs. Jameson. The paper on Maeterlinck has contact-value; that on Rostand is less worth while. The discussion of Shaw's purposes and plays is not very edifying. The writer too often tries to justify a doubtful judgment by shouting it. We wish that he would re-read

Emerson's finely sane and always apposite essay, *The Superlative*, and then count the times he has sinned against that good counsel in the present volume. Shaw is "one of the greatest playwrights in the history of the stage"; he "has an absolute [regrettable word!] genius for drama." (p. 75). "In literature he is a star of the first magnitude." (p. 77). But how can that be true when, as Professor Phelps admits, Shaw's works, "instead of having an emotional interest, have the keen play of dialectic"? (p. 97). No; without emotion no play can have a soul, and the most deft and agile of bodies or of minds will not save it for pure drama. Mrs. Jameson is right in saying of Shaw that:—

"in the creation of his men and women, he has spent much wit and little humor; much mockery and little irony; much keenness of intellect and less lasting truth; little beauty, much analysis, and hardly anything of inspiration. . . . It is not his men and women that we remember, but the ideas with which he has bedecked them; not character, but words; not personality, but the wrappings of personality." (pp. 143-4.)

Mr. Pichel's treatment of theatrical architecture and of detailed stage design is highly intelligent and useful. The author knows the history and literature of his subject, has had adequate practical experience, and interestingly conjectures some of the future needs and processes of the theatre. He writes clearly of technical requirements, and attention to his rules and suggestions will profit not merely those builders of new theatres who care for art as well as commerce, but also the designers of school auditoriums intended to serve both theatrical and non-theatrical purposes.

Despite Mr. Dickinson's assertion that in the First and Second Series of his *Chief Contemporary Dramatists*, "there are now made available in convenient form thirty-eight plays of the first order of excellence from the theatre of Europe and America", we should select only nine from the first volume and eight from the second as plays not indeed uniformly deserving of so high an estimate as his, but likely to survive the others for a long time. In both volumes, Mr. Dickinson has unfortunately in-

cluded some very poor material. The only really tolerable among the seven American plays appearing in the two volumes are *The Piper* and *The Yellow Jacket*, and neither of these is anywhere near "the first order of excellence". In Moody's *The Fire-Bringer* and *The Masque of Judgment*, not in his *The Great Divide*, we taste his true quality. It is difficult to understand why the editor permitted himself to include, on any ground, *The Witching Hour* in the first volume and *The Easiest Way* in the second. They are both psychologically crude, artistically insincere, and structurally ineffective. Nor is it possible to approve the inclusion of Somerset Maugham as a significant dramatist, nor the omission of Wedekind, Capus and others, whose works were presumably more accessible for an anthology of this character than those of Barrie and Shaw, representation of whom could not be secured. We regret to have to dissent also from Mr Dickinson's easy disparagement as old-fashioned of the critical works of Freytag and William Archer on dramatic craftsmanship. We agree that Professor George P. Baker's *Dramatic Technique* is a sound and useful book, but for serious students it is far from superseding either of the other works named. The mechanical work and editorial aids, however, in both of Mr. Dickinson's books, deserve commendation. For schools, colleges and clubs, these collections provide ready if painfully various material.

The Provincetown Players have gathered into an attractive volume ten of their one-act plays, of which the outstanding ones are Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Aria da Capo*, Eugene G. O'Neill's *Bound East for Cardiff*, and Wilbur Daniel Steele's farce, *Not Smart*. The prime weakness of most of these little plays is due to their desire to be 'different', resulting in strain and in a touch of pose and flippancy; but they are interesting as evidences of the growing fascination of the drama for young American writers and as suggesting the possibility that just as the American genius achieved excellence in the short-story during the nineteenth century, so, for largely the same reasons, it may find some flowering in the one-act play during the next twenty or thirty years.

Mr. Eugene G. O'Neill's dramatic work is steadily improving in both craftsmanship and characterization, but it still betrays something of the constrained, self-conscious spirit that hurts the efforts of his immediate rivals. He appears to be more at ease, hence more successful, with the dramatic discovery of racial qualities in individual types, as in *Bound East for Cardiff*, *In the Zone*, and *The Emperor Jones*, a remarkable study in eight scenes of the inner life and outward actions of Brutus Jones, 'Emperor' for a little while of an unidentified island in the West Indies. In *The Straw* and *Diff'rent*, a play in two acts, Mr. O'Neill attempts, not very convincingly, yet with plausible little plots and sufficiently realistic backgrounds, to interpret the characters of two women, Eileen Carmody and Emma Crosby, the one a sensitive, fine-grained, but over-sentimental 'leaner'; the other a silly, aberrant egotist, shown first as an ultra-puritan at twenty, and in the second act, thirty years later, as punished by nature for her moralistic exclusiveness. Neither Eugene O'Neill, Jeannette Marks, Percy Mackaye, Susan Glaspell, Alfred Kreymborg, Percival Wilde nor George Middleton, however, has as yet produced a one-act play comparable in conception, insight, suggestion and power to the better work in this kind of Maeterlinck, Hauptmann, Strindberg, Hervieu, Synge, Barrie and Masefield. The truth would seem to be that with the rise of the subjective or 'literary' drama, the psychological possibilities of the one-act play, its ability to satisfy Oscar Wilde's requirement that truth in art should be "the unity of a thing with itself", began to be disclosed. The Drama of Ideas and the *Théâtre Libre* have greatly advanced the one-act play in dignity and in scope.

Of the remaining plays under review we need say little. *Six Who Pass While the Lentils Boil*, one of Mr. Walker's "Portmanteau Plays", is a disappointing effort at fantasy that quarrels with its own devices, and *The Cult of Content* is a strained and confused 'guess at the riddle of existence' in pedestrian blank verse.

The signs of the continued dramatic revival that appear in the more important works here dealt with and in the multiplicity of

programmes and courses of study in colleges and clubs suggest the accumulation of social and spiritual forces throughout the world of thought, that make for a re-examination of the grounds of belief and of conduct, and for a more intelligent philosophy of human history.

G. H. C.

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY. Part I, The Acts of the Apostles. Edited by F. J. Foakes-Jackson, D.D., and Kirsopp Lake, D.D., Vol. I, Prolegomena I : The Jewish, Gentile and Christian Backgrounds. London : Macmillan and Company. 1920. Pp. viii, 480.

This is the first volume of three. It is historical in character, dealing with the Jewish, Gentile and Christian life, thought and religion, as a background for the later study of the book of Acts, first in its literary phenomena, and then, finally, in its actual text. In other words, the first two volumes will constitute an introduction telling about the Book of Acts, while the third volume will contain the text, with its translation and exposition. This volume is dedicated to Professor George Foot Moore, of Harvard, to whose phenomenal learning and unfailing kindness to all co-workers a well-deserved tribute is paid in the Preface. Other scholars have contributed articles on special fields, notable among which is the contribution of Professor Clifford H. Moore, also of Harvard, on *Life in the Roman Empire at the Beginning of the Christian Era*. For fairness's sake the editors secured the co-operation of a Jew, Claude G. Montefiori, in dealing with *The Spirit of Judaism*. He presents, of course, the very best side of Judaism, but strives to be fair in his treatment, and especially in dealing with the representations regarding the spirit of the leaders of Judaism in the time of Christ contained in the writings of the New Testament. So he says of the Jewish teaching of that time (p. 41 f.):—

“We find the view constantly repeated that Israel's lesser sins are carefully and fully punished in this world in order that it may receive the full beatitude of the world to come, while the minor and occasional virtues of the heathen are fully and carefully recompensed here in order that they may suffer more hereafter.”